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VADE MECUM, VOLVENTIBUS ANNIS

Degree 6 - 7

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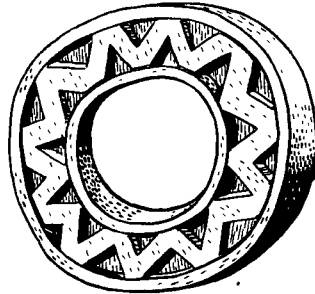
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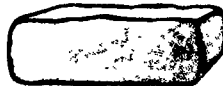


STANDARDS OF LIVING

YOUR LIFE PATTERN

Beloved Companion:

The Art of Living is the grandest of all arts and he who masters it enriches the lives of all about him. What subject could better hold the attention of Mayan Philosophers?



Moo Lu Akin and his students were passing the busy market-place of Mayapan one day, when a potter's wares attracted his attention.

Examining various examples of pottery, he called attention to the various points of excellency. Some were painted with characteristic patterns, some had highly original designs, some were lovely and artistic, and some were ordinary and others poor.

Choosing several identical pieces of the best and several identical pieces of the poorest, Moo Lu Akin asked his students what lesson could be drawn from them.

"That there is lasting joy from work well done", said one of the Chela.

"That good work multiplies joy", said another. "The artist finds joy in creating it, and the joy is multiplied in the eyes of each beholder", said another.

Then, as the rest were silent, Moo Lu Akin said:

"Both observations are true, but there is yet another lesson we may learn here at the potters. Consider this, that a product is never better than the pattern set. And most products would be better if better patterns had been set for them."

It is often said that a fountain never rises higher than its source. With equal truth it might be said that a runner never presses farther than his goal. If the goal is too easy he stops when he reaches it just the same as though it had called out his best efforts to attain it.

One of the choices each of us must make in his thinking and living is whether he will content himself with the easier goal of accepting things as they are, or whether he will strive for the harder aim of realizing things as they ought to be. In the one case he will not go so far, even though he attains his goal. In the other he will go farther, even though he does not fully attain it.

The person who accepts things just as they are and does not concern himself about trying to change them we call a Realist. The person who is always looking beyond the present condition and visualizing the possibility of a better one that might be attained we call an Idealist. Each of us has to decide which he will be, or whether he can reconcile the two into a single plan.

In what is known as the Victorian Era the idealistic viewpoint was in the ascendency. It showed in the books, dramas, paintings, and life of that time. It was a kind of sky-gazing age, a time when people cultivated the upward look, a period when the usual advice to the young was, "Hitch your wagon to a star."

Then a reaction set in and we found ourselves in an age of realistic emphasis which has not yet passed. People discount the Victorian Period with its great dreams, its happy endings and its talk of lovely things. They say it is foolish to set goals beyond one's reach or to think of things as other than they are. This spirit in turn is reflected in the writing, painting, and living of our time.

The realistic way of thinking has the advantage of seeming practical because it is based on things that can be seen and conditions that are evident. There are other considerations to be taken into account, however.

On the other hand, the idealistic viewpoint has the disadvantage of being outside the range of the so-called practical mind, also that of requiring more effort and struggle than it takes to let well enough alone, as people say. In other words, it is the harder way, though the harder way sometimes turns out to be the more rewarding one.

The present age seems to have chosen to try to be realistic, but it is still a question whether it is truly so. If one will examine these so-called realistic claims and writings he will find that they too are one-sided, and that the person who adopts such a viewpoint in its entirety has only gone over from one fragmentary belief to another. Half-baked thinking eagerly seizes upon one side or the other of a question and closes its mind to everything else. The careful thinker surveys both sides, and often finds that they are no more in opposition than the two sides of a coin or a sheet of paper.

The question whether there is anything better than what we now have and see around us is, however, one to be thought through. On the answer depends the hope or despair of the race. Let us therefore examine it with some care and see what answer the consideration yields.

The great difficulty with accepting things as they are and contenting ourselves

with that is that it is what is called a static viewpoint. Such a viewpoint is one that stands still instead of moving forward. A static thing is one that is unchanging. It is dead, because it has no vitality or progress in it. It is not dynamic, for it releases no power for its own advancement and improvement.

The so-called realistic viewpoint is one of satisfaction, and satisfaction is fatal to progress. No one who is satisfied with himself tries to do any better, and no one who is satisfied with things as they are can be expected to trouble himself to try to improve them.

The spirit of the idealist, on the other hand, is one of divine dissatisfaction. He is always looking for something better, lovelier, more desirable. It is from such a spirit that progress comes. The idealist is a chronic pioneer, always pushing on to new and better frontiers of every kind. When he reaches a goal he does not rest there, but promptly sets a farther one and presses on.

It must be admitted that this is not the easy way to live. The dreamer is always making inconvenience for himself that could have been avoided. It is not because he must that he is always trying to make a better man of himself and a better world to live in. He could stop and go to sleep at the level of self-satisfaction too, but something within him keeps urging him on. He makes trouble for himself, but he feels well rewarded for his effort and sacrifice.

To be dissatisfied is not to be discontented. That is quite another thing, and perhaps the difference needs a brief notice. The Apostle Paul wrote that he had learned in whatsoever state he was, therewith to be content. Notice that he did not say he was satisfied, for Paul was never satisfied. He was always trying to improve on things, but he knew how to content himself while he worked and waited for results.

The word "satisfaction" comes from two Latin words meaning "to make enough", which is quite a large order. The word contentment comes from two other Latin words meaning "to hold together". The satisfied man is one who has enough - all he wants. The contented man is one who manages to hold together. Contentment is a Christian virtue. Satisfaction is an enterprise-destroying drug.

In the beginnings of the development of life from the single-celled animal we find that one of the first steps is mobility, or the power to move about. Another early step is the development of irritability, or the power to feel the effect of external things and to respond to them. From this beginning the senses develop, and the highly complex organs known as the eye and ear are only amazingly powerful means of taking up the slight irritations caused by light waves and air vibrations and translating them into sight and sound. An irritant administered in the right degree has challenge in it.

Socrates had this in mind when he said his mission was to be a gadfly to sting the people of Athens to thinking and action. He was a man who lived a contented life, yet had this divine dissatisfaction with things and was always trying to plant it in the thoughts of others. Thus he made his great contribution to the wisdom and progress of the human race. He was an irritant, seeking to keep the people from being satisfied with less than the best. So was Jesus of Nazareth. So have been all the great truth-bearers of the world, the dreamers of the ages.

The idealistic way of setting higher goals than one can reach and more

exacting standards than one can attain is not so impractical and foolish as it may appear. That is what keeps us moving forward. It is the challenge that keeps us struggling and reaching.

"The reach must exceed the grasp", wrote Robert Browning, "or what's a heaven for?" The person who reaches only for what is within his grasp may satisfy the desire of the moment, but he will never develop strong arm muscles nor build a longer radius of power. Only struggle to do what is not easy does that. Unusual powers are the outgrowth of unusual effort, and unusual effort is put forth only by those who are trying to do something better than it has been done before.

If we only set attainable goals and standards we stop with them and rob ourselves of that crowning adventure, the glory of going on. That is the condition to which they would doom us who sneer at the habit of dreaming of better things.

A discouraged traveler on the desert sees a mirage. It is not an unreal and imaginary thing at all, but the mirrored image in the air is of something that exists somewhere on the earth, though possibly many miles away. The traveler struggles forward. Probably he does not reach the thing he saw, because it is not where it seemed to be. Yet the effort made leads him on till he escapes from the desert, and perhaps finds his way into an even better condition than the mirage pictured. It was not, then, a vain thing. A challenge that lures one onward never is vain.

Take notice, then, that one makes a mistake when he assumes that an ideal is not real. It is just as real as is the condition one sees about him. In fact the condition he sees about him was once only a possibility, and it was just as real as a possibility as it now is when it is an actuality. The possible condition still unrealized is just as real as the one that has been actualized.

Two men stand looking at a block of raw marble. One is a workman who prides himself on his practical-mindedness and boasts that he takes things as they are. Accordingly he sees a block of marble there - nothing more and nothing less.

The other man is a sculptor. He scarcely sees the block of stone at all, because he is looking inside it at a beautiful image imprisoned there, an image which it is his purpose to take his chisel and release. Stop and think. Is not the image the sculptor sees imprisoned in the marble just as real as the block of raw stone the workman sees?

The reality of a full-blown flower is imprisoned in every rosebud. The potentiality of a golden harvest is hidden under the greenness of every growing field of grain. The reality of a giant oak is in every tiny acorn. The reality of a fully emerged epoch is in every unfolding event in human history. The reality of a destiny is hidden in every trend of a man's life. The New Jerusalem is hidden in the prophet's dream.

A great and beautiful building, or machine, or bridge, or ship, was a blueprint a little while ago. A little before that it was only an idea in a man's mind. But it was always real, and if the man of whose dream it is the fulfillment had been satisfied with things as they were, it would never have come into existence. It is the child of his divine dissatisfaction.

The so-called realist would take the block of marble, or the rosebud, or the

acorn, and let it go at that. Not so with the idealist. He dreams of the possibilities that are hidden in things, and if he is a practical idealist he sets to work to make the dream come true. Contrary to the popular conception, the idealist is the most practical of men. He is the discoverer, the inventor, the Mayan, the leader, who makes the history of the race.

The block of marble is inanimate, so someone must release the image from it. But the acorn and the rosebud are living things, animate with the vitality their Creator has planted in them, so every day and hour the pattern within them is unfolding, and never stops till the plan is fully realized. God must be an idealist then. If He were not the universe would still be waste and void. Moreover, one has to be an idealist even to be a good realist, for reality can draw no dividing line between the actual and the possible.

In some regrettable way Realism has come to be identified with the acceptance of the ugly, the hopeless, the painful, and the wrong. The writer of unhappy and despairing literature, the teacher of gloomy and discouraging viewpoints, and the painter of ugly pictures are for some strange reason called realists. Realism is also made responsible for all kinds of cruelties committed in the name of necessity. It was a favorite term with the champions of aggrandizement who brought on the second world war.

The notion at the heart of all this seems to be that only the ugly, the wrong and the miserable are real. If that were true, what a shameful and tragic joke human existence would be! But it is not true. The lovely is just as real as the unlovely. The good is just as real as the bad. Hope is just as real as despair.

By what reasoning can anyone make out that a storm is any more real than the sunshine that follows it, or that a weed is more real than a flower, or that darkness is more real than the starlight that struggles through it? By what principle is ugliness more real than beauty, evil more real than good, or pain more real than happiness? What right has one to insist that the world is a miserable place because he looks at it through blue lenses, and if someone else looks at it through rose-colored ones, why is his mistake any greater? The fact is that the self-styled realists are a bilious race who insist on everyone else being as bilious as themselves.

Of course the human race has carelessly let the world life get tainted with injustice and unhappiness, but it is not all that way. There is probably more about the world that is right than there is that is wrong. Why question the reality of it because it is right? We all meet people who do not seem to have discovered what life is about, but then we all meet more people who are kind, and patient, and gracious. The list of the world's great saints, servants, and benefactors would be a longer one than is the list of its great enemies and wrongdoers. Anyone who is fair-minded will gladly testify that he knows more good people than bad ones. And how real they are! No one questions their reality because they are honest and kind.

A family moved into a strange neighborhood, knowing no one there. Busybodies warned them that it would be well to have nothing to do with a certain woman. They named no specific complaint against her, but said she was not liked and was considered dangerous.

Soon the little boy of the family fell desperately ill and lay helpless for many weeks. In that remote country neighborhood the family had a hard time managing.

In all that time not one of the gossips came near, but every day or two the woman against whom they had issued their warnings came or sent her children with little things to eat, or read, or play with, to brighten the path of recovery for the sick child. Instances like that are not uncommon. The world and the years are full of them. And how real are they and the people who make them possible!

By an old shed lay a heap of junk and a pile of ashes. Beyond it a bright little stream ran along a tree-fringed hillside reached by a rustic bridge. Two painters made pictures of the scene. One canvas showed the shed, the junk pile and the ash heap. The other was a picture of the stream, the hillside, and the bridge. It was a matter of emphasis. Both were real.

A certain man went to visit his birthplace. The old house, after being unoccupied for years, had burned down. For thirty years only a heap of stones had marked the spot. The orchard was gone. The springhouse had vanished. Even the spring had dried up.

But in what had been the dooryard the flowers were still blooming, the continuing stock of those that had blossomed there fifty years before. The thing that had been loveliest had endured longest. Perhaps the beautiful is even more real than the unlovely. After all, are not roses remembered long after their thorns are forgotten?

Our Great Companion, the Savior of mankind was the world's greatest Realist in that He saw things as they were with an accurately appraising eye. But He was also the world's greatest Idealist in that He was also always seeing things as they might be.

One morning He looked at the city that was the center of life for His people and wept over it. One might say that He wept because He saw it for what it was - a city of carelessness, shallowness, and indifference - but that would not be the whole truth. He saw many careless and wicked towns and did not weep over them.

But this time He was seeing something else too - the city of hope and rightness and gladness that Jerusalem was meant to be and could have been, the "things that belonged to its peace." It was the difference between the two pictures that brought the tears. The sorrow of the idealist is always the difference between what is and what ought to be, but that sorrow is only a part of his challenge to work for the transformation from the one to the other.

Little by little, through the years, the Savior's dream comes true, because it is the possible image of beauty in the raw material of confused and misdirected human struggle - and that image too is real. No one else ever saw things as they were so clearly as He, but to Him everything was and is a possibility of something better. His was the idealistic mind that is always reaching on toward more ultimate goals, sufficient ones, challenging ones, redemptive ones.

The First Book of Samuel tells how the sons of Eli did not know Jehovah because they were base men. That is, they were too crude and unrefined to be sensitive to anything so fine and high. They were crude men, in the same sense that crude metal is called base.

In an ingot of pig-iron are many fine watch-springs. As pig-iron it isn't

worth much, but when it is refined into steel and made into watch-springs its value is multiplied manifold. The watch-springs are just as real as the pig-iron, and all that stands between the two is a process of refinement to make the metal more adaptable and responsive. This is as true of a base man as it is of base metal. He is the possibility of something infinitely finer and better. If the needed development takes place, he too will be sensitive to such things as truth and God.

It takes effort to change pig-iron into watch-springs, a crude life into a beautiful one, or low-grade action into high-grade action. One must see the possibility and be willing to work to realize it. He begins by setting a standard for himself, one that is high enough to have challenge in it. However much of a realist he is about seeing things as they are, he must also be idealist enough to see them as they might be.

We all want and need to be practical. Of course we need to see and know things as they are, but to accept them at any stage as final is a great mistake. The hope of the race and of ourselves is that beyond the chaos and baseness of things as they are we shall see what loving and intelligent effort could make of them - a City of God where dwell people whose tears are all wiped away - and that we shall be willing to invest the necessary effort to realize that ideal.

So we go onward up the years, gaining a new foothold here and there because someone glimpsed a better possibility and never rested until he had made his dream come true. The essential difference between us and the creatures that remain content with the slime and clay is that we have caught a glimpse of the vision splendid, and when one does that he can never again rest till the vision is realized. Struggling on to reach it he covers distance, and that is what men call progress.

Three things remain to be said in this discussion. The first is that the realist needs to learn to be more open-minded. When he does he will see that the world is not a slime-pit but the lovely home of a kingly race. It has an abundance of beauty and goodness in it, and he who measures reality by ugliness casts reflection upon his own attitude toward life.

The realist needs to bring himself to understand that the most real thing in life is the onward march of things, the dynamic process by which every bud is turning into a blossom and every experience into a destiny, the continuing creative principle that anything around us is only a stage in the development of some better thing yet to be. How can one be a realist if he sees only the dead things, the static values, the inanimate side of life and the world?

The second thing is that the idealist is himself responsible for some of the reproach he suffers. He sometimes carries his dreams and visions too far, or says too much about them, or says it in the wrong way. He must divide the word of truth sanely and carefully if he wishes to win for it the respect of people of integrity, and thus achieve his purpose.

Dreams and prophet ecstasies are things too wonderful and fine to be brought into reproach by irresponsible visionaries. They deserve the most careful and honest reception, reporting and application. That is what makes them count in world affairs and progress.

What careful, honest-minded men the prophets of Israel were, yet even they

had to meet disapproval created by the careless and extravagant who tried to be prophets. The men whose writings have come down to us had standing in their day and have it now because they respected their visions of truth and reported them with care and integrity.

With these conditions met on both sides the realist and the idealist might find that no difference any longer exists between them. That would be as it should, for the real is the basis of the ideal and the ideal is the flowering of the real.

The third thing to be said is that it is not by the goals attained, but by those unattained that we move on in the path of achievement and realization. Resting on laurels already won only results in stagnation and decay. It is the challenge of the farther goal that counts.

Perhaps that goal seems out of reach. What does that matter? The farther out of reach it is the greater distance will be covered in trying to reach it. The important thing is to get on.

Ponder this question. In it is this whole teaching.
Is it better to reach for a star and miss or leap at
a mudhole and score a hit?

As Moo Lu Akin used to say, "There is more room upward and onward than there is downward and backward."

Besides, there is the glory of breaking new trails and experiencing new adventures. That is the way we grow, and to grow is why we are Mayans. It is not so serious a matter not to have reached a given point, but it is a very serious one not to have gone as far as it was in us to go.

Let us then go forward and onward together toward greater glory.

Vade Mecum, Volventibus Annis,

THE MAYANS